

“This must be it.”

She had arrived at a cave opening. Nothing seemed too special at first, just looked like another shallow cavern that the forest of Nibel was littered with. But looking inside... it seemed as though all light changed its mind as soon as it entered, turning around and heading back whence it came.

Walking inside, there was no doubt about it. The darkness in this cave was unrivaled by anything else Nibel had to offer, even the most densely packed groves of the Misty Woods.

“Yep, this is definitely it. Black Root Burrows.”

She had heard about this place before, but was warned that spirits were not used to such intense darkness. Entering would be an awful idea, for the mistakes one could make while guided by only their bodies glow and the radiance of strange, ancient platforms of light were numerous. But there was a spirit who had decided to go anyway. Unsurprisingly, this spirit was Ensy. She was known for disobeying sensible recommendations in favor of more foolish, thrilling pursuits. She had proven this time and time again, most infamously by being among the first spirits to discover their spirit abilities, something that was heavily advised against due to the consequences of using spirit abilities at a young age.

Among the most famous thrill-seeking adventures she had gone on were: Traveling to the ruins of the gumon city Forlorn and getting hypothermia and first degree frostbite, trying to climb Sorrow Pass and nearly falling to her death, getting lost in Misty Woods for two weeks before she finally showed up again, and climbing the Ginso Tree so she could go for the “ultimate dive”. If Sein had not explained to her, in a panic, that doing so would turn her into the “ultimate pancake”, she would have.

“Wish I brought a torch.”

Ensy trudged on through the darkness, paying close attention to her feet to ensure that she did not stumble off of a ledge. Ori may have visited and lit up this place many years ago, but whatever he did to banish said darkness had clearly run its course. The darkness that engulfed and coated everything in sight, which was

approximately nothing except for the ancient light platforms and anything within a foot of her body, was relentless in destroying visibility. This forced Ensy to move far more slowly and cautiously than she would have liked, but she supposed that if it meant that she wouldn't fall off of an ed-

"AAAAHHHHHHH-"

In a twist of irony, thinking about not falling off of an edge had sabotaged her focus, causing her to stumble right off of one. Luckily, it was not too far of a fall, but it was far enough to get the wind knocked out of her and flood her body with pain.

Ensy slowly, unsteadily rose to her feet, shrugged off the few bruises and cuts she had sustained, and moved onward. Onward through the darkness. The glowing platforms created by the ancient spirits were gone now, and the darkness somehow seemed even deeper.

She walked down a sloped passageway that took her even deeper into the Burrows. And then another. And another. Just how deep did this place go?

"I feel like this is going to be Misty Woods all over again, but at least Misty Woods had food and water. I'd rather not eat whatever cave mosses I find here, assuming that any can grow in such a dark place. And where will I even get water from?"

The realization that she could starve or thirst to death in this dark cave was not a pleasant one. But surely she could find her way out before that happened! Right?

Maybe she should turn back. It wasn't as far in as she wanted to go, but she had not expected for Black Root to be such a labyrinth of darkness.

Speaking of labyrinths... which way was out again? She had traveled down a few branches passageways, and was currently in a tiny room with 3 paths. She had no idea which one she had come from. It couldn't have been the path she was facing, but there were 2 behind her that she could have come from.

"That way looks good..."

Ensy traveled down the path closest to her, hoping that it would take her somewhere familiar. It did take her somewhere, but it was not familiar. Or maybe

she had been there, but just didn't recognize it? It is quite difficult to retain knowledge of where you have been when the only defining features were rocks that all looked the same.

Ensy had heard that Black Root Burrows used to contain a small city, so where were the buildings? Maybe none had been built this deep in; maybe there was a bridge across the ledge she had fallen into that would have taken her to them. Either way, buildings would have been handy landmarks to prevent her from getting as lost as she was now.

She needed to keep moving. The passages would take her to an exit eventually, she just needed to keep moving. It had worked for Misty Woods, it would work for the Burrows. After all, the Burrows was just a maze of cave systems, not a vast grove filled with hallucinogenic gas. She would get out soon if she just kept moving.

"Wait. What's that sound?"

She heard a strange, quiet noise coming from her left. It sounded as though something was dragging itself along the rough stone floor. The noise became more rapid as she turned to face the sound as it got even quieter.

"Hey! Is there anyone there? Anyone at all?"

Whatever it was that was making the noise must have slowed down upon hearing those words, as they became less frantic sounding.

Ensy started to walk forward while calling to whatever the source of the sound was. An idiotic decision in hindsight, but Ensy was never particularly knowledgeable when it came to concepts like "common sense" and "safety".

"Who are you? Show yourself! Or at least say something!"

"Leave....."

Whatever it was, it had responded to her calls. Although "leave" is far from the first thing you want to hear when you are lost in a cave filled with a pitch-black void, it was at least not some mindless creature that would either be of no help or see her

as prey. That last thought made her realize that trying to get its attention was a bad idea, but oh well.

“What in- why should I leave?”

“You... scare me.....”

“Scare you? Why would I scare you?”

“Eyes... hurt to look.....”

“It hurts to look at me?”

“Yes... now leave.....”

“No! Not yet! Come closer so I can see you!” That marked the 3rd stupid thing that she had said in the past minute, which probably would have ended in her brutal death by mauling had this creature been anything else.

“No... you hurt... can’t.....”

“I won’t hurt you! Just look away, maybe?”

“Not sure.....”

“It will be okay. Alright? Not going to hurt you, just look away!”

“I... okay... but no hurt.....”

“I won’t, don’t worry.”

As the creature approached Ensy, she was taken by awe at its appearance. It was like a worm, but much bigger, covered in some sort of plated material, and had a well-defined, easy-to-identify head. The head had flaps on the sides that stretched to its... neck? It was impossible to tell where its neck ended and body began, assuming that it wasn’t all body like the worms that it resembled.

“Wow... mind telling me who you are?”

“Who... I am?... What is meant?.....”

“Your name! What’s your name? You know, like what you call yourself!”

“Oh... like that.....”

The creature then let out a startling hiss that made Ensy leap back instinctively. Why did it hiss at her?

“That... is name.....”

“That’s your name? Really?”

“Yes... is good name.....”

“Well, I can’t say that. So I think I’ll just call you... Hiss.”

“Hiss... is also good name... maybe.....”

Ensy had a lot of questions for Hiss. Why was he down here? How could he talk? Why did he talk the way he did? She wanted to get out, but now that felt like a secondary goal. She had finally discovered something interesting!

“So, Hiss... how are you able to talk? I wouldn’t think that something so far underground could speak.”

“Before me... there were friends... friends not like us... they taught carers... who taught me.....”

“Carers? Do you mean your parents?”

“Do not know word... they cared for me... taught me... what friends taught.....”

“So yeah, your parents.”

“New word... like before... like friends taught... par-ents..... Then purple came... purple and gold... friends gone.....”

“Oh no... anyways, why are you still down here? What do you eat, and what do you drink?

“Water... back at nest..... Food... all over... was hunting for food... when you came..... Here because light scares... light hurts... hurts eyes... you hurt eyes... must not look.....”

Ensy wondered what Hiss saw through his eyes. She was old enough that she could use her power without passing out now, but it would still make her drowsy. Was it worth it? To anyone else, probably not. The possibility of falling asleep was still present, and a dark cave deep underground is not a pleasant place to take a snooze. But to Ensy, it would be more than worth it, even if she did fall asleep.

“Hold on, can you look at me real quick?”

“What... no... will hurt... light hurts.....”

“Don’t worry, it will be very quick you might not even feel the pain! Or maybe you will, I still don’t know how this power works.”

“Don’t know... about this... bad.....”

“Please? Just a quick look.”

“I... will try... maybe.....”

As Hiss turned his head to face Ensy, she immediately used her ability to see the world through *his* eyes. And as soon as it did, she knew that he definitely saw the world in a different light.

Literally.

His vision was unlike anything she had ever seen. Instead of seeing the world like she did, or just pure darkness, there was color. The ground, walls, ceiling, air... it was all colored, with varying densities of the colors outlining them, allowing Hiss to see in the darkness. Whatever his eyes used to see, it clearly was not the light that Ensy was used to.

And then there was her smack dab in the middle of his vision, emitting an ungodly amount of this strange energy that only Hiss could see. It didn't burn, but it did feel incredibly strange. A feeling that made her want to claw her eyes out, although in this case, her eyes were the eyes of someone else. She quickly broke connection as she moved out of his sight.

"Wow, that's really something else."

"What is?.... Eyes hurt... did you try... to hurt me?"

"No! I would never try to hurt you! I just wanted to see what you saw, see how bright I was to you. And wow, I really am very bright in your eyes."

"Don't understand... but okay..... You like old friends... from before... before me... before purple came... before purple and gold..... Others... parents... liked old friends... I will like... you....."

"Really? You want to be friends? Huh."

"Yes... friends... like before me..... I can have... friends now....."

"Sure, why not? Hope you understand if I don't visit often, but it was difficult to get here, and I don't even know if I can leave."

"Leave..... Saw light before... hole with light... while on hunt..... Place to leave... there..... will lead....."

"Oh thank the Light, there is another way out. Alright, take me there!"

Ensy followed Hiss through a plethora of tunnels, luckily all big enough for Ensy to squeeze through, until he brought her to an exit. It led to a beautiful sheltered coast, a beach covered by a large rock outcropping. A picturesque, secluded spot that she would surely keep in mind for relaxation somewhere down the line, when thrill-seeking finally took its toll. But there was something else she would keep in mind... *someone* else.

“So... mind if I come back in a few days? I have lots more to ask you, and maybe you could ask me some questions as well!”

“Yes... please... like old friends... Hiss wanted... old friends... and now he has... thank you.....”

“No problem, Hiss. I’ll call for you when I return.”

“And I... will wait...”